



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on December 31, 2020

How Kevin McCarthy Could Become House Speaker January 3

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) [told reporters earlier this week](#) that she has the speakership in the 117th Congress “wrapped up.”

But with opposition to Pelosi increasing, on January 3 the new Congress could elect the House Republican Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy as speaker instead.

On the Sunday after the election, even before all the votes were in, McCarthy explained just how it could happen:

To become speaker, you have to have 218 votes on the floor. When [Pelosi] went up for that vote two years ago, there were 15 Democrats who voted against her. Ten of those Democrats will be coming back to Congress. If those ten vote against her again, she will not be speaker of the House because she won't have 218 because of the gains of the Republicans.



AP Images

Now that all but two of the House races have been called, the Democrats have a scant majority, 222 versus 210 (one congressman elect just died), enough to cause Pelosi some serious heartburn.

She is among the least-liked members of Congress, an advantage Republicans have used in their fund-raising campaigns. A recent *Politico*/Morning Consult poll showed that a third of Democrats don't want Pelosi as Speaker.

Her waffle on socialism and her refusal to criticize the “quad” — Representatives Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.), and Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.) — has cost her support of moderate Democrats, some of whom refused to vote for her as speaker in 2018.

Ten of the 15 Democrats who either voted against her, or who voted “present” instead, are returning. If just a few of them refuse to support Pelosi, then she will lose her grip on the gavel.

She faces another obstacle: the COVID virus, which is likely to keep some Democrats from attending in person on January 3 as required in order to vote for the speaker.

The numbers aren't looking good for the liberal from California. With the Democrats holding a thin 10-or-so seat majority, and at least three of them already declaring that they don't intend to vote for her, health conditions that keep just a few more Democrats from being physically present could end her



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reign.

Said Representative Hank Johnson (D-Ga.), “If we have sick members who cannot come back, and we only have a four-vote majority, it [could put our control] of the 117th Congress in peril.”

Another Democrat, Representative John Yarmuth (D-Ky.), posed the following scenario:

Let’s say, just theoretically, [that] we had six or eight people out with COVID and the Republicans had none. They would probably elect McCarthy.

Mark Tapscott of *The Epoch Times* did the math: If enough Democrats were forced to skip the opening ceremony on January 3, and the number needed to elect a new speaker was therefore reduced to “214, a coalition [of Republicans and disaffected Democrats] would only have to gain votes from four of the 10 Democrats and all 211 Republicans to defeat Pelosi.”

Brian Darling, former senior counsel to Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and founder of Liberty Government Affairs, also sees the growing chances of such a coalition:

The speaker needs a majority of those present and voting to garner a majority, and if a coalition votes “present” as a protest vote, it is likely that the coalition can either negotiate with Pelosi for concessions on the rules and committee chairs, or [create a] coalition with Republicans to elect a different speaker.

A different speaker would be costly to the Republicans in terms of their ability to use Pelosi as a foil to generate campaign funds for their candidates, but would be a welcome change. Few would miss the irascible, irritating, and often vitriolic anti-Trump speaker in the 117th Congress.



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